

Storms of Grevahdi

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Summary: A series set on the original planet Grevahdi, which is based on the multiplayer map Sandtrap. It follows the last stand of the rogue Elite known as the Holy Warmaster and his campaign against the Brutes to recover stolen relics.

1. The Holy Warmaster

The blazing orange sun shone brightly, even through the wall of intense smog and black dust that continually manifested and polluted the skies of Grevahdi. This was a world near death; though its dunes endured yet against blood and fire, its precious oases had been lost to the glassing of its settlements by the swarming vessels of opposing Covenant fleets in orbit. The once-revered skuumat trees were now all but extinct, along with the few animal species native to the sands. All that remained of the mythic world were its ravaging storms and the alien camps scattered across its surface, unwelcome and unaccommodated.

The Holy Warmaster--the former "Arm of the Prophets," Durj'sriik--surveyed the sweltering battlefield that had once been the Bau'ri Imperial City of Ylateen. His palms bled from the strain of their grip on his two ceremonial plasma blades. His scarred body ached with fatigue and his soul grew darker with each moment of combat, but his resolve remained unhindered. He could feel the pores on his scalp sprouting sores from the weight and endless friction of his helmet. He disliked the cumbersome weight of his grenade and ammunition bandoliers, the discharged beam rifle mounted on his back atop his deactivated Kig-yar energy shield. All around him, his Elites and their scarce engineers regrouped and gathered the weapons of their fallen brethren. His second in command, Theil'hask, came to his side without the insult of a poorly selected word.

"The temple at the core of the city," the Holy Warmaster rasped. "We must seize its treasures before the Brutes."

"You speak truly, my friend," Theil'hask replied. The elderly warrior

was a more fragile creature than most of the Elites in the Holy Warmaster's rogue fleet, a testament to the rationality and philosophical roots of the now-warlike Sangheili species. He wielded only a primitive single-bladed variant of the traditional plasma sword, a relic of the ancient war against the species that became their heretical Prophets.

"My Lord," interrupted a squawking Unngoy, Dalgib, "Our Hunter has already wandered inside the base of the building!"

"This is unusual," the Holy Warmaster replied. "Lekgolo beasts never stray from direct orders unless it is absolutely dire..."

"Perhaps it has a good reason, then," Theil'hask reasoned. "We should get moving."

The entire squad of Elites and their solitary Grunt comrade, Dalgib, began marching in recon formation toward the massive temple. Plasma blades ignited with a roaring simultaneous hiss.

"Me use the fuel rod cannon?" Dalgib asked, his cowardice possibly warranted.

"You may," said one of the Sangheili warriors as he hefted the weapon from his back and onto the Unngoy's shoulder harness. "Conserve ammunition and do not fire unless we're all out of the way. Remember what Vurnum did to Trehl'dus."

The newly empowered Grunt led the way into the ancient stone installation. The low, gutteral bellow of their lone Hunter could be heard deep within the bowels of the temple.

Theil'hask glanced at Durj'sriik, whispered: "I smell the sickening stench of Jiralhanae."

The Holy Warmaster shook his head. "No--Drones."

The shadowy naive of the colossus amplified the distant shrieks of two distinctly different sources. The empty hall of alien columns and pedestals where once beautiful statues had been broken off led into a single doorway, relatively the height of a Wraith tank. Once the squad of Elites had reached it, the Holy Warmaster signaled for Dalgib to inspect the room beyond via the tiny rectangular hole in the door. He crept toward the door, obstructing the others' view of the gap.

"Our Lords! Oh, Gods, take me! Aaaaaahhh!" Dalgib dropped his fuel rod cannon and scampered toward the Elites for salvation from the horrors beyond the door. Durj'sriik seized his throat and lifted him from the ground.

"Cowardly Grunt!" the Holy Warmaster barked. "I should--"

But he had no time to do anything before the door flung open, and a grievously wounded Kig-yar clawed his way toward them across the floor. The Jackal no longer had any legs, and his eyes appeared to have been masticated by the maw of some hellish beast unimaginable by even the Warmaster. His cries of agony were justification for spontaneous suicide.

The scarce light of the clarestory windows ceased, and a swarm of Yanme'e flooded the vast chamber, swallowing up the Jackal like some small insignificant morsel.

Blinded by a shade of winged demons bent on their destruction, the Elites brandished their weapons and let loose an eruption of rampant streams of plasma and hurled grenades into the shallow air above.

The temple ceiling rained blood, and the carnage reaked in the dry air.

"Elites!" cried the Holy Warmaster above the din of Drone extermination. "Let us make our way into the next room!"

They all complied, but many barely survived the momentary lapse of gunfire. Their single Unngoy companion stupidly attempted to retrieve his fuel rod cannon.

"Dalgib, no!" screamed Theil'hask. He reached for the idiotic Grunt's claw and pulled him toward the door.

As they made it through, one persistent Drone clasped onto Dalgib's artificial atmosphere suit and punctured the tank. The suit shot a pungent cloud of methane into the air. It stunk worse than the innards of the Yanme'e, but seemed to effectively deter the armored insects. Durj'sriik made note that the brave Unngoy's sacrifice would be honored by the surviving Elites when the war was over.

The chamber beyond the naive was undoubtedly the heart of the massive shrine, though it had been littered with the shameful blood and fire of the Drone's previous ambush. All that remained of the fallen Jackals were their fragile skeletons and a few damaged carbine rifles. The scattered, smoldering innards of their brave Lekgolo warrior could be detected in their primitive, ununited form throughout the room.

Shrapnel from a Brute spike grenade was apparent in the scarring on the walls. Not even the claws of a Jackal could have marred the walls so viciously.

"The Brutes," Theil'hask whispered gravely. "They must have raided this temple days ago, and raised a Yanme'e hive for the sole purpose of a clever ambush. It seems to have worked."

"Not so," the Holy Warmaster remarked. "We are still alive, and the Kig-yar population on Grevahdi must have been nearly wiped out by this swarm. Look at all the ash and bones... The Brutes rely heavily on their long-ranged gunnery skill for guarding their camps. We should fly our wounded back to the medical ship by Phantom. We can commandeer Brute Prowlers and maul through their defenses during the next sandstorm--the Jiralhanae fight poorly during fierce weather."

"Truth!" shouted the squad in unison.

"Once we can seize the Brutes' communications center, we can amplify a signal strong enough to contact the Arbiter and his new human allies."

Theil'hask cursed with the prejudice of his long years as an ethnocentric warrior, though he would never allow such discontent to reach his friend's aural receptors.

"We shall send the Brutes back to the unknown hell from whence they came, and let it be known that our Prophets would have us bathe in the fires of that hell!" Durj'sriik raised a pair of crisscrossing plasma blades.

"You speak with great clarity, my friend," said Theil'hask, honoring the Warmaster.

The Holy Warmaster smiled with his tentaclelike maw. "Then let us leave this sandtrap."

2. The Universal Dream

Even outside of the ancient alien ziggurat, the Warmaster and his Elites exercised caution. The harsh Grevahdian winds were picking up as twilight neared, and it was difficult for the weary Sangheili to shield their eyes as they hefted salvaged weapons and their severely wounded. Off in the distance, evidence of previous battles lay strewn across the dunes: abandoned Ghosts, Brute Choppers, and Banshee flyers--even a downed Scarab was forever entombed in the perilous sands of the desert plain. War had left their race with scars that extended far deeper than their charcoal flesh.

As Durj'sriik assisted Theil'hask in carrying a particularly critical and heavy equipment container to their solitary Wraith tank, the Warmaster, with fire in his eyes, breathed a raspy murmur of discontent: "This world be damned!"

Theil'hask could not hide his shock at his dear friend's remark, nearly dropping his end as they eased the cylinder onto the warm sand. He easily recalled a time when he was full of passion. And though he was, like all Sangheili, insatiable to the end, he had come to realize something about himself--perhaps all of his kind: he did not look forward to death. The meritocracy they had forged on Sangheilios had flourished under their standard set of rules, and it had been an age of honor and civility. The tan suit of specialized assault armor that the Holy Warmaster now wore was hauntingly similar to the very one he himself had worn in the last years of the Age of Reconciliation, when he was a field commander.

He had left his homeworld a very young and impressionable warrior, and aged far more rapidly once he began aiding in the crusades of the Covenant. Through all the turmoil, across vast burial mounds now replaced by plains of swirling glass, the scarred, elderly sentient had not forgotten the musings of his youth. But as Theil'hask reminisced, atop this high plain of bloodstained sand so close to the sun above, he felt tired. Old, weak, and nostalgic, he was ashamed of his age and defeatist morale.

He was jarred back into the moment by the Warmaster's bidding: "Send a distress call to the Phantoms; tell them we have wounded. And have them do an aerial scan for the Yanme'e."

Durj'sriik relieved himself of the excess weight on his back, allowing his Kig-yar energy shield emitter and beam rifle to fall to

the ground as he began loading the bulk of their cargo onto the Wraith tank. His muscles felt as if they might tear apart under the strain of their ongoing abuse.

"The Holy Warmaster requests pickup at our position," Theil'hask said over the chaotic communications network, still in severe disarray from the destruction of one of their vital command cruisers in Grevahdian space. "We have at least twenty wounded, and several dead. An entire hive of Drones wiped out our squad inside the central structure of Ylateen."

"We're within range to pick you up quickly," the pilot replied. "I pray your fallen brothers died quickly--the Yanme'e are a truly despicable infestation amongst our former ranks, exemplification of the Jiralhanae intellect lies in their conversion."

"Our past oath and devotion to the Covenant is a mark of shame we must all bare," Theil'hask remarked. "We must transcend the blindness of our heresy and think only of our future."

The signal flattened and was suddenly lost, but the roaring fusion drives of Phantoms could be heard loudly above even the blaring static of the transceiver device.

As the mid-ranged vessels settled into the sand, the Holy Warmaster finished loading the equipment into the Wraith and stepped onto the Siren of Havoc, his custom-shaded personal Phantom. Once inside, he ordered the pilot to ascend and attach the Wraith to its undertow.

Theil'hask watched with sadness as his wounded comrades were carried into the three remaining Phantoms. He felt his vascular muscles tremble from the nightmarish reminders of the Drone ambush that seemed to be flickering ethereally in the wide-open eyes of his bleeding brethren.

When at last the entire squad and its cargo was onboard, Theil'hask stumbled wearily into the back of one of the craft. Grasping the hilt of his ancient energy sword with purposeless tenacity, he sought salvation in dreams, drifting into a deep sleep that lasted for hours.

The Holy Warmaster paced the deck of his Phantom and brooded silently, eyeing the faces of his resting myrmidon with unobvious scrutiny. These were warriors--ones who never faltered in the face of unfavorable odds, never gave the slightest regard to the probability of death in the midst of battle. They had known countless wars of the conversion of various new species into the Covenant, unleashed genocide upon unworthy "infidels," and had fought for the right of salvation on their so-called Sacred Rings. The stars would forever remember the hell wrought by these Elites. And now, they had a new war. They were facing extinction, as were the humans--while the Parasite was gathering somewhere ominous and distant, ridiculing them for their misery.

The onboard communicator rang out and an unfamiliar voice filled the air, sounding vaguely similar to that of an articulate Grunt:
"Warmaster? Do you copy?"

Durj'sriik seized the transceiver from its resting place on the wall

and responded to the strange message: "This is the Holy Warmaster Durj'sriik, yes. Identify yourself."

"This is Pelican Echo-One of the UNSC Bastille. Our friend, the Arbiter, said we should come looking for you guys."

The Warmaster smiled subtly upon hearing mention of the Arbiter. "He's still alive, then. Excellent. I find it somewhat disturbing that we must rely on our enemies for refuge, but we have no choice... We're desperate; the Brutes have stolen many of our camps and shrunk our numbers considerably. These ancient structures provide a decent means of concealment amongst the dunes, but the Jiralhanae are a menace!"

"I hear you, Warmaster... And I think--I see you."

A droning rumble shot through the air around the Phantoms and sand obscured the Siren of Havoc's viewscreen. Outside, a massive human frigate could be seen plunging into the sand of the highest near plateau. A flight of several Pelican escorts was yawning out of the way of the spaceship as they slid into the sands just beneath the Phantoms. From behind the Bastille came a wave of Hornets, Warthogs, and Mongooses.

"Jetison the Wraith and land us near those human dropships." The Holy Warmaster was particularly pleased with the humans' arrival, which surprised even himself. This war had drawn on for far too long, and now true justice could come of it. The Brutes would pay for their crimes with blood--they knew of nothing less. "So intriguing is the concept of enemies and allies. We shall once again be victorious!"

"The Elites are fools!" The pack leader, an Honor Guard named Vornikar, growled as he studied the screen of his mapping computer. His eyes were beginning to strain from the contrast of the monitor and the dim lighting of the underground bunker that housed his brethren. "That they haven't found and attacked this pitiful hideout yet is testament to their utter lack of intelligence. If I wasn't so truly starving, I'd fly over to that infidelic ship and crush their Warmaster underfoot right now!" He unconsciously glanced at his gravity hammer along the wall, lusting for the blood of his greatest enemy. Feeling perspiration begin to accumulate beneath his helmet, he removed it and scratched his bald head. He could feel his mane beginning to grow back, but was in no mood to shave it--it could prove a reliable source of protection from the sun, regardless. He roared, lost in his frustration.

One of Vornikar's subordinates, a tactician named Herlaum, approached him unintrusively. "Brother, we are blessed in finding this place. We should concentrate our energy on building up our defenses instead of praying for a way out of here... This planet is truly a hell in its own right, but we can use that to our advantage--the shade provided in this secret structure is an excellent way to keep cool while the Elites roast under the heat of the sun. The longer we wait it out, the weaker they will be when we strike at them!"

"But they are impatient, Herlaum; they will come sooner than you think, cutting our throats while we slumber! We must move the loot we've stashed away here to space somehow--the only thing keeping the Sangheili from blasting into slipspace and never returning to this

wicked planet is the treasures we hold. They know the runes on these structures are not Forerunner; they seek to uncover the mysteries shrouding this world just as we do. That the humans have joined them in their hunt is as surprising as the presence of the sun overhead!"

Herlaum knelt down beside his lifelong fellow warrior, said very calmly: "Our chances of survival are already improbable. Even our most sacred prayers could do nothing more for us now than allowing the Elites to die alongside us, never making the Great Journey... This battle is not one we can win with strategy--outsmarting and killing our nemesis will do us no good in the face of death. This is a battle for our honor."

The entire pack of Brutes encircled their leader: "For honor!"

"And a last stand for glorious salvation!"

End
file.